DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 489 CS 508 700

AUTHOR Johnson, Edward A.
TITLE Schema Wars: Conflicts between Heavy TV Viewers and Heavy Church Attendees as to "The Most Important Problem Facing America Today."
PUB DATE 20 Nov 94
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (80th, New Orleans, LA, November 19-22, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attendance Patterns; Attitude Measures; Audience Analysis; Audience Response; Churches; Comparative Analysis; Higher Education; *Mass Media Effects; *Mass Media Role; National Surveys; Television Research; *Television Viewing

ABSTRACT

Noting that several current communication theories suggest that the media have a "persuasive" effect on American society, a study compared the effects of two media (the electronic medium of television and the spoken medium of the homily) and whether these media have different effects on their audience's perceptions of reality. A national phone survey of 552 random residences was conducted. The amount of time each respondent spent per day watching television and the number of times per month each attended church or worship service were found. Respondents were then categorized as to whether they viewed television and attended church more or less than the median. Respondents were also asked what they felt was the most important problem facing America today. The frequency of these responses were compared for heavy and light TV viewers and church attendees. Results indicated that these media were not significant factors in respondents' view of the most important problems facing America today. In fact, results support the value of scholarly consideration of the objective impact of real-world indicators along with the effects of the media. (Contains 20 references and 3 tables of data.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 374 489

Schema Wars:
Conflicts Between Heavy TV Viewers and Heavy Church Attendees as to "The Most Important Problem Facing America Today"

Edward A. Johnson
University of Alabama

Presented at the national convention of the Speech Communication Association in New Orleans, November 20, 1994.

CS508700

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RUNNING HEAD: Schema Wars

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
E. A. Johnson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to compare the effects of two media: the electronic medium of television and the spoken medium of the homily. The question to be researched is whether these two different media have different effects on their audience's perceptions of reality.

A national phone survey of 552 random residences was conducted for this research. The amount of time each respondent spent per day watching television and the number of times per month each attended church or worship service were found. Respondents were then categorized as to whether they viewed television and attended church more or less than the median.

The respondents were also asked what they felt was the most important problem facing America today. The frequency of these responses were compared for heavy and light TV viewers and church attendees. The results suggest that these media are not significant factor s in respondents' view of the most important problems facing America today.

Schema Wars:
Conflicts Between Heavy TV Viewers and Heavy Church Attendees as to "The Most Important Problem Facing America Today"

The purpose of this research is to compare the effects of two media: the electronic medium of television and the spoken medium of the homily. First will be discussed the theories regarding the effects of the media in general, and then the specific media of television and homilies will be examined.

Several of the current communication theories suggest that the media have a persuasive effect on American society. Examined below are three such theories—Gerber's cultivation theory, Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory, and Iyengar and Kinder's agenda setting and priming theories.

In his culturation theory, Gerbner claims that television differs from other media in its centralized mass production and ritualistic use of a coherent set of images and messages created for total populations. This theory of cultivation is based on the belief of a persistent and pervasive pull of mainstream television on a great variety of social currents. Gerbner sees the main point of television as the absorption of divergent currents into a stable and common mainstream, with an almost religious effect. The heart of this analogy of television to religion and the similarity of their social functions lies in the continual repetition of patterns (myths, ideologies, "facts," relationships, etc.), which serve to define the world and legitimize the social order (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, 1986, pp. 18-20).

Another theory of the effect of television and other media is Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence. Her theory describes our desire to avoid the isolation caused by expressing opinions contrary to those presented as normative

by the media. Noelle-Neumann found parallels between the way newsmaking occurs in all the different media she investigated. She found this resonance among media established a consonance of media content. The fear of isolation from this standard seems to be the force that sets this spiral of silence in motion (Noelle-Neumann, 1984, pp. 6, 404).

Similar to the theories of Gerbner and Noelle-Neumann are those of Iyengar and Kinder on agenda setting and priming. They describe how Americans trust mass media news and depend on it for information. This gives it an enormous capacity to shape public thinking. In their experiments they found the media appear to be exceptionally effective in setting the agenda of what we consider news and in framing how we view it. "Against the power of television news, education by itself offers little protection" (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987, pp. 1-2, 93).

These three theories are examples of mass communication scholars' current view of the effects of the media. Interestingly, no such theories were found over the past 50 years that claimed contrasts among different media. Rather, most of the literature that address the contrasts among different media appears to be generally limited to a description of their histories, such as Black and Bryant's (1995).

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to add to the media effects literature by explicitly seeking contrasts in the effects of two different media. The media of television and homily were selected for their dissimilarities: first, their essences are different; second, their gatekeepers are different, and third, there is a belief their effects are different .

Essence

There are two essential differences between television and the homily. The first essential difference is between the physical media themselves. Television is

a modern, electronic medium with extensive requirements, including special sending and receiving devices. On the other hand, the spoken message is an ancient medium needing no more special equipment that air to carry sound waves.

The second essential difference is between the audiences of television and the homily. For this reason, most textbooks about mass communication, such as Black and Bryant's (1995), include television as one medium of mass communication, while excluding speech, which Price categorizes as public and private communication. Price states that the mass of mass communication is composed of anonymous individuals and is marked by very little interaction or communication among its members, as opposed to the public, which is a group of people, such as those who would attend a church service to listen to a homily (Price, p. 27-28).

Gatekeepers

Not only are television and homilies essentially different, but the world view of the people who control the contents of these two media are also quite different.

Obviously, the religious leaders who present homilies must be persons with religious commitment. On the other hand, the gatekeepers of the news media, such as television, are not a pious group, as indicated by a recent study of 240 journalists and broadcasters: half rejected any religious affiliation; only 8 percent attended church or synagogue weekly; and 86 percent seldom or never attended religious services (Black & Bryant, 1995).

The differences in beliefs between the clergy and journalists are significant. One example of these divergent views is presented in a recent Freedom Foundation report—described in the September 20, 1993 U.S. News & World

Report. It compares the views of journalists and members of the clergy as to the media's coverage of religious issues. The report describes a wide chasm and an unhealthy distrust between these "two alien cultures." The study, which includes a survey of some 900 clergy and journalists, suggests that this mutual mistrust may result from false stereotyping and a misreading of motives, rather that any deep-seated ideological differences (Sheler, p. 70).

Effects

The third difference between television and homilies is their perceived effects—especially in terms of malevolence. While there are abundant examples of the shortcomings of those who present homilies—from Sinclair Lewis' Elmer Gantry to Martin Luther's diatribe on Tetzel's indulgences—nowhere was there found a suggestion that the medium of preaching itself has a negative effect. No such claim can be made about television. Only four authors will be cited who have written about the negative, intrinsic effects of television: Allan Bloom, Neil Postman, Malcolm Muggeridge, and Brandon Centerwall.

Bloom extensively bemoans the disintegration of Americans' ability to reason since the advent of television. He seldom directly attaches the medium. One exception is his description of MTV as "junkfood for the soul" (1987, p. 77). His is more a lament of the demise of intellectual thought that accompanied reading, rather than a accusation of television as the culprit.

Postman is much more explicit in his attack on the effects of television. He accuses television of being a medium capable of only entertaining, not informing; so, as Americans watch more and read less, we become a less informed society. The problem, Postman claims, does not reside in what people watch. The problem is in that we watch (p. 160).

For Postman, television produces an image-centered rather than a word-centered culture (p. 61), and images can only entertain—thinking does not play well on television (p. 90). Postman claims that entertainment has become the supra-ideology of all discourse on television (p. 87), with "good television" having little to do with what is "good" about traditional, intellectual exposition (p. 88). For Postman, television "damn near obliterates" traditional school curriculum (p. 146).

Even more damning are the comments of Malcolm Muggeridge, former Moscow correspondent for the London Times and editor of Punch. Whereas Postman only accuses television of being incapable of doing more than entertain, Muggeridge charges that television is malevolently perverse. It makes the painful things of life, such as fighting, attractive, while it makes the pleasant things, such as conversation, seem boring.

Muggeridge accuses television of being part of "...a mighty brainwashing operation, whereby all traditional standards and values are being designated to the point of disappearing, leaving a moral vacuum..." (p. 23). For Muggeridge, "...the effect of the media at all levels is to draw people away from reality,..." (p. 60).

Perhaps the strongest condemnation of all comes from Brandon Centerwall. In his article on television and violence in the Journal of the American Medical Association (1992, pp. 3059-3063), Centerwall goes so far as to measure the destructive power of television in terms of thousands of lives lost annually as a direct result of video violence.

Obviously, there are substantial differences between television and homilies—not simply because of the physical media themselves, but also because

of the views of their gatekeepers and their perceived effects. The differences are as great as those of two opposing schemas, or views of reality.

If there is indeed a schema war occurring among these media, then Festinger's cognitive dissonance suggests that people would not be comfortable taking in information from both sources (Littlejohn, 1989, pp. 88-90). Lippmann shares a similar view when he says, "...since my moral system rests on my accepted version of the facts, he who denies either my moral judgments or my version of the facts, is to me perverse, alien, dangerous (Lippmann, 1922, p. 82).

Contrary to this view, Iyengar and Kinder found that political involvement may be positively related to reception and negatively related to acceptance. Whereas the politically involved may be more likely to tune in and pay close attention to television news coverage, they may be less likely to be persuaded by the coverage since their views are more firmly anchored (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987, p. 61). In the same way, regular church attendees may be regular news watchers, especially regarding religious news, although they may be the least affected. In support of this, Noelle-Neumann notes what she calls the dual climate of opinion—the climate the population perceives directly, in contrast to the climate as portrayed by the media (Noelle-Neumann, 1987, p. 167). For example, a regular church attendee may see one climate of religion through the mass media press, and experience something different in the public media of a church service.

The question to be researched here, then, is whether these two different media do indeed have different effects on their audience's perceptions of reality. The research hypothesis is the following:

H_r: There is a statistically significant difference between what heavy television viewers and heavy church attendees believe to be the most important problem facing America today.

Method

A national phone survey of 552 random residences was conducted during October 1993 in order to gather data for this research. Respondents were ask the number of minutes each spent per day watching television and the number of times per month each attended church or religious services. The median viewing time per day was 120 minutes; the median number of services attended was two.

These median responses were used to be categorize the subjects as to whether they were heavy television viewers (above the median) and whether they were heavy church attendees (above the median). These two categories were then used as the two independent variables in a 2X2 design.

The respondents were then each asked what they felt was the most important problem facing America today. The responses to this question fit into 18 categories and were used as the dependent variable.

Such research has high external validity since it examines how the media may actually be affecting perceptions. At the same time, it lacks the internal validity of a controlled experiment.

Results

A 2X2 contingency table (heavy vs. light TV viewers and heavy vs. light church attendees) was examined for each of the 18 different categories of "the most important problem facing America today." These tables were first examined to ensure a frequency of at least five subjects in each of the four cells

per table. Five tables met this criterion for reliability; the other 13 were deleted from the study.

A chi-square test was run on each of the remaining tables to test whether or not there was a significantly high frequency of the heavy users of one medium or the other. None of the six was significant. The table with results the closest to being significant dealt with the problem of "jobs and economy" (χ^2 [1, N = 116] = 2.08, p = .15). Table 1 shows a comparison of heavy television viewers and light church attendees to the heavy church attendees and light television viewers.

Place Tables 1 through 3 about here.

Although the problems of "abortion" and "moral decay and values" failed to have a high enough frequency to be retained for this study, Tables 2 and 3 show these responses for further discussion later.

Discussion

There are at least four possible reasons why these results were not significant. First, there may be a problem with the scales, resulting in a ceiling effect. For example, television may have nearly as great an impact upon the light viewers as upon the heavy viewers. Second, there may be a dispersion or two-step flow of information. For example, heavy viewers may be passing along their attitudes to their light-viewer friends.

The third alternative best fits the theories of Iyenger and Kinder and Noelle-Neumann, discussed previously. For example, Iyengar and Kinder found that political involvement may be positively related to reception and negatively related to acceptance; so while a person may attend one medium, such as television, it does not necessarily follow that that person will accept the view

being presented. Similarly, Noelle-Neumann notes what she calls the dual climate of opinion—the climate the population perceives directly, in contrast to the climate as portrayed by the media. Again, attending a medium does not mean acceptance.

This third view appears to be supported by tables 2 and 3. People who are heavy church attendees are more likely to believe abortion and moral decay are the most important problem facing America today, but they are just as likely to be heavy television viewers as they are to be light. There is no apparent interaction between the media.

The fourth explanation, and perhaps the most likely, is that the media may not have a powerful effect. Perhaps the people who responded that the economy and jobs were the most important problem facing America were people with economic or job problems themselves, regardless of whether they watched television or attended church.

This fourth "reality over media" alternative is in line with the research of Rogers and Dearing (1988, 1993). In their agenda-setting paradigm they indicate how "real-world indicators" can affect every step of the communication process. In this case, what people personally experience become more powerful real-world indicators of America's problems than what they see on television or hear from the pulpit.

This, too, would be in accord with the earlier writing of Schramm (1977) who presented the history of mass communication research as a chronicle of limited effects.

The idea of an objectively real world having a greater effect than the media is in stark contrast to the beliefs of several communication scholars. Lakoff and Johnson doubt where there is such as thing as an objective reality (1980, p. 184),

and Carey simple states there is no reality there (1989, p. 26). The results of this present study fail to support these claims. In contrast, they support the value of scholarly consideration of the objective impact of real-world indicators along with the effects of the media.

References

Black, Jay & Bryant, Jennings (1994). Introduction to Mass Communication. Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark. Chapter 6.

Bloom, Allan. (1987). The closing of the American mind. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc.

Casey, James W. (1989). Communication as culture: Essays on media and society. New York: Routledge. p. 26.

Centerwall, Brandon S. (1992). Television and violence: The scale of the problem and where to go from here. Journal of the American medical association, 267. pp. 3059–3063.

Festinger, Leon. (1957). A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Gerbner, George, Gross, Larry, Morgan, Michael, & Signorielli, Nancy. (1994) Growing up with television: The cultivation perspective in Jennings Bryant & Dolf Zillmann (Eds.). Media effects: Advances in theory and research. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gerbner, George, Gross, Larry, Morgan, Michael, and Signorielli, Nancy(1986). Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process. In J. Bryant &

D. Zillmann (eds.), Perspectives on Media Effects. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc. pp. 17-40.

Iyengar, Shanto, and Kinder, Donald R. (1987). News that Matters. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark. (1980). Metaphors we live by. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 184.

Lippmann, Walter (1922). Public Opinion. New York: The Free Press.

Littlejohn, Sthephen W. (1989). Theories of Human Communication (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

Muggeridge, Malcolm. Christ and the media. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Noelle-Neumann, E. & Mathes, R. (1987). The event as event" and the "event as news": The significance of "consonance" for media effects research. European Journal of Communication, 2, (4) 391-414.

Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth. (1984). The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion—Our Social Skin.

Postman, Neil. (1985). Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business. New York: Penguin Books.

Price, Vincent. (1992). Public Opinion. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Rogers, Everett M, Dearing, James W., & Bregman, Dorine. (1993). The anatomy of agenda-setting research. Journal of Communication, 43(2), 68-83.

Rogers, Everett, M. and Dearing, James, W. (1988). Agenda-setting research: Where has it been, where is it going? In James A. Anderson (ed.). Communication yearbook/11 (pp. 561-594). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Schramm, Wilbur, and Roberts, Donald (eds.) (1977). The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Sheler, Jeffery L. (1993, September 20). A clash of cultures. U.S. News & World Report. pp. 70-71.

Table 1

A comparison of heavy church attendees

to heavy television viewers

	Heavy church—light TV	Heavy TV—light church
Health care	28	31
Economy	22	27
Crime-drugs	19	20
Deficit spending	11	10
Foreign policy	10	8

Table 2

Frequencies of those who felt "abortion" is the most important problem facing America today

	Light church attendees	Heavy church attendees
Light television viewers	0	4
Heavy television viewers	0	3

Table 2

Frequencies of those who felt "moral decay and values" is the most important problem facing America today

	Light church attendees	Heavy church attendees
Light television viewers	1	9
Heavy television viewers	0	10